Theogony

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/2472968.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	F/F
Fandom:	Person of Interest (TV)
Relationships:	Root | Samantha Groves/Sameen Shaw, Bedelia Du Maurier/Hannibal Lecter (background), Myka Bering/Helena "H. G." Wells (mentioned), Delphine Cormier/Cosima Niehaus (chapter 2), Marisol "Flaca" Gonzales & Maritza Ramos (mentioned), Clarke Griffin/Lexa (chapter 4), Olivia Pope & Huck (chapter 5)
Characters:	Sameen Shaw, Root | Samantha Groves, Myka Bering, Delphine Cormier, Cosima Niehaus, John Reese, Harold Finch, Kate Beckett, Maritza Ramos, Clarke Griffin, Lexa (The 100), Olivia Pope, Huck (Scandal)
Additional Tags:	Crossover, Alternate Universe - Greek Mythology
Language:	English
Series:	Part 2 of When Universes Collide
Stats:	Published: 2014-10-18 Updated: 2018-05-31 Words: 19,214 Chapters: 5/7

Theogony

by FujinoLover

Summary

When Root mentioned about God, she didn’t mean it in literal sense.

(Or in which Sameen was the daughter of Hades and Root wasn’t quite human either.)

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

> This whole story started with one simple line of thought: *Hannibal is the perfect Hades, Shaw is one of his daughters*. Then of course my brain loves to overcomplicate everything. Plenty of characters and ships will show up, but this is designed to be Root and Shaw's story.
>
> Welcome to my mind palace.

Sameen materialized on the rooftop of an abandoned apartment somewhere near the Hudson River. Winter started a week ago, but snow had covered almost every surface and she grimaced. She loathed winter, with more ardor than she could exude. It was the time of the year where her grandmother would grief, because her mother was obligated to stay in Hades.

Sameen couldn't bear watching her parents during this four months period. The almighty Lord of the Dead and the fair maiden from the sky, if only it was love that had brought them together. The Underworld was suffocating with her mother's even colder heart and enforced presence, while the Earth wasn't unlike the Underworld either. For eons, Sameen would flee to the tropical lands, enjoying the warm sun until spring came around. However, this year, something—or rather, *someone* had drawn her attention.

She took no visible form—for human's eyes, that was—as she made way to the edge of the building. Her steps left the thin blanket of snow undisturbed. She blended into the shadow of a neighboring building, looming over a man's prone form. She admired his dedication, even more with the sniper rifle being held steady on his hands and where the muzzle was trained at. Down on the deserted alley below, a meeting was taking place between a man and a woman. Even bundled in thick black coat and beanie covering her head, Sameen recognized the woman with unwanted familiarity.

Thanatos had brought the mortal into Sameen's attention not long ago. He lamented to Macaria, her older sister, about the peculiar woman. He was intrigued and also aggravated because she had brushed with Death for more times than any human should, yet managed to dance her way around it. He went as far as cajoling Macaria to take her for real the next time she came face to face with Death again, to which the goddess laughed at. Sameen had began stalking the woman ever since, from the comfort of her quarter in the Underworld, and was pleased to find the mortal worthy of holding her interest.

(She admitted that she was *that* bored. Nowadays humans no longer prayed to her kind of Gods, Olympus and the Underworld were pretty much deserted. Even the ever-wise Athena was parading in mortal vessel on Earth, assuming a life as Secret Service agent in South Dakota with no other than Helen of Troy—or *Helena G. Wells*, as people called her—as her

partner. As it turned out to be, Aphrodite's offer of Helen's beauty didn't only sway Paris' judgment but Athena's as well.)

Studying the state-of-art sniper rifle and the finger that had moved to its trigger, Sameen almost felt bad for the woman. *Almost*. The thrill of presenting her soul to Thanatos triumphed whatever little sympathy she had. She waited then, watching the woman with similar intensity as the sniper.

She didn't have to wait for long because the woman slipped her hands into her coat pockets. Sameen frowned at the sudden movement. The action seemed innocent enough, warranted even, because a particular cold wind had just blown about, but not for Sameen. There was a certain thrill tingling throughout her body, which only happened whenever death-related action might take place.

As she had predicted, the woman whipped out guns, one on each hand. Faster than one could blink, she fired, and without even looking at her targets too. Two hits the man on the kneecaps, rendering him to curl on the ground and wail in pain. Another seemed to miss its mark as it hit the apartment's topmost railing inches away from where Sameen was standing. The stray bullet rebounded on a perfect angle and embedded itself on the sniper's shoulder. Red speckled the white snow, but not enough to tempt Death for a visit.

In fascination, Sameen leaned forward to peer over the railing. Her fingers touched the dent left on steel and a small grin curled on her lips. She watched the woman searched the fallen man's pocket and took out a brown envelope. The sniper on her side twitched. Despite the obvious pain, he reached for his rifle and took aim with trembling hands. Something must have alerted the woman because she glanced up on the last second, her eyes meeting Sameen's.

Without second thought, Sameen grasped her hand in a tight fist and the sniper groaned. He clutched his wounded shoulder until he passed out from the intense burning sensation. She glanced at him with dissatisfaction. There was no doubt that his pain was her own doing. She hadn't meant to do so; she didn't come out here to help the woman. Just a second ago, she had wanted her *dead*. But their eyes had met, not through her or at something near her. The woman had stared *at* her and she shouldn't be able to in the first place.

Biting her lip, she canvassed her surrounding for any immediate threat. No sudden portal opened up under her feet to swallow her back to Hades. No three annoying women of Moirai coming to punish her. Aside from the unconscious man by her side, the rooftop stayed unperturbed. She sighed, relieved that she hadn't got in the way of Fates. Death was in her being, but interfering with mortal's time—whether to shorten or lengthen it—deserved equal consequence, one that she didn't even dare to think of.

Her own troubled thought was enough punishment for the moment. She reasoned that she had done what she did because the woman was interesting and she would like to keep her around longer. Thanatos might as well wait a little bit longer. She would drag this woman down to Hades herself, but later, after she had her fun watching her wrecking havoc on Earth first. She settled on the thought, refusing to acknowledge the other suggestion that if her action wasn't counted as meddling with Fates, then it was possible that she was fated to help the woman in the first place. Such notion didn't go well with her.

When she looked down at the alley again, her musing was cut short as the woman met her on the eye *again* and broke into a smile. Before Sameen could react, she sauntered out of the alley and into the waiting black SUV on the street.

By Styx, Sameen swore she had *winked* at her.

Chapter 2

“Tell me again, what are we doing here?”

“Operatives work best in pair,” Sameen said. She didn’t bother to be polite in the presence of an older goddess. “Didn’t they teach you that in Secret Service?”

Myka—derived from one of Athena’s own epithets, *Mykene*—frowned at that, but didn’t indulge her grumpy cousin with an answer. “Why didn’t you bring Macaria?”

“She sucks on spying.”

At that, Myka had to agree. Macaria, with her love for designer dresses and fancy shoes and inability to lie, was, as Sameen had put, *sucked* on doing anything stealthy. She would never be caught doing what they were doing at the moment—loitering on a local park, trying to look busy while keeping an eye on the woman Sameen was fixated with.

“And she has a job now.” Sameen scoffed. “As the Chief Medical Examiner for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.”

“It is...a very Macaria thing to do.”

Sameen rolled her eyes, but agreed nonetheless. She couldn’t fathom her older sister’s tendency to be so kind. Giving human a blissful death was generous enough, she didn’t understand why Macaria needed to give closure for those unfortunate ones finding their demise in the hand of another human (and hence, Thanatos). Death was Death. No matter which way it came, they all would end in Hades.

Sameen was distracted from staring at her mortal interest when Myka prodded on the odd-looking gun strapped on her waist yet again. “Why don’t you bring a real gun instead of a taser?”

“I do.” To prove her point, Myka pulled back the lapel of her jacket, exposing a black handgun safe in its shoulder holster. “And it’s not a taser. It’s a Tesla. Helena met him in person and he—“

“Gave it to her as a present, once upon a time.” Sameen completed the sentence, in fear of hearing Myka going on another adoration-filled rant about her consort. So much for employing chastity.

“Speaking of Helena, you should’ve brought her.”

Myka sounded rather hurt. Granted, Helena was the main reason the Trojan War happened in the first place and it could have been prevented if she told anyone that it was only an illusion of herself that Paris kidnapped. Despite being her father, Zeus claimed it as an act of betrayal and selfishness, but it was a long time ago and Helena had changed since. Still, Myka had

made it her mission to assure everyone that she was safe to befriend and wouldn't cause world destruction, *again*.

"She did well yesterday," Myka said.

Indeed, Helena had been helpful. Not in the way Sameen preferred, though. Stealth happened to be not a part of Helena's strong suits either. The moment Sameen pointed out their target, she marched forward in her mortal form and charmed her way in using her beauty and silver tongue and thick English accent. She had pretended to be a lost tourist stumbling upon the woman and scored herself a name. *Root*. No doubt a nickname, but a start nonetheless.

Aside from the aggravation Sameen felt as she observed those two chatting like old friends with a big dose of flirty smiles from both sides, it was the whole *darling* thing that grated her nerves the most. It forced her to ask for Myka's companionship this time (she was a Death God; she couldn't care less if Helena planned to cause the next world war). Myka herself wouldn't be roped into this stalking if not for Helena's little remark of Root, who with such ample intelligence shining on her eyes could pass as Myka's younger sister.

"I need a trained agent," Sameen said with a huff after stalling off from answering. Before Myka could vouch for Helena again, she added, "Who know how to do *covert* mission correctly."

They fell into another silence then. They had tailed Root from a safe distance for a while now. The woman wandered around the park with a man by her side. They were chatting, but from their body language it was obvious that they had just met earlier that day. Sameen had never seen him near Root before either.

Another man with glasses—a familiar face Sameen recognized—joined Root, or more like she imposed her presence on him. It was quite apparent from his stiffness and delayed response as she took a seat beside him on the park bench. Both of them were watching the other man from a safe distance. The man with glasses looked no less serious than at the times Sameen saw him before, while Root maintained a smile. She alternated between talking with him and scribbling something onto the newspaper she had snatched from him.

"Have you tried looking at her lifespan?"

Sameen frowned. She hadn't thought about that.

"Try it," Myka said after studying Sameen's expression. "Then we'll know if she's human or more."

So Sameen did. Her eyes changed from its normal dark brown into gold irises with red pupils and pale yellow sclera. The world stayed unchanged in her eyes, except for the additional numbers hanging above everyone's head. Seeing mortals' lifespan was one of her privileges as a Lady of the Underworld, one that she often forgot about since she never cared enough to use it.

Myka remained unperturbed when Sameen stole a glance at her—her own eyes could glow in eerie bluish-green at times and it wasn't like Sameen would see any lifespan above her head.

Immortals didn't have any expiration date. As long as there were humans out there writing and spreading their glory, they would live on for eternity.

"Hers is a string of gibberish..." The revelation didn't surprise Sameen. "Interesting." She hummed in approval as the color of her eyes darkened back. It made things even more appealing than it already did. "A nymph, maybe?"

"I can't feel anything from her." Myka turned back to Sameen after scrutinizing Root for some time. There was something about the woman, even Helena had confirmed so, but she couldn't put her finger on it. "What makes you think so?"

Sameen shrugged in lieu of an answer. She might have numerous dalliance with their kind and Root did look like one.

They stayed idle until Root made a sudden move. She was in haste as she pulled her first companion with her and they scurried away as the man with glasses went to a different direction. Not a second later, a group of men with odd masks and guns were chasing after them.

Myka cocked a brow, asking if they should do something about it and got turned down in return. Sameen had everything she could gather without coming in direct contact with Root and knowing that she wouldn't die any time soon, her attention lay upon the newspaper Root had left behind. It was tucked on the far corner of the bench, as if waiting for someone to pick it up. Sameen wasn't disappointed with what she found on it.

"Secret code?"

"More like secret message." One glance at the scattered letters being circled on the front page, Myka had strung them together into words. "*Did you miss me?*" She eyed Sameen with worry while the latter furrowed her brows.

It appeared that Root had noticed them after all.

The next time Sameen arrived on Earth, she stood in front of a pastry shop across the University of Minnesota. She had expected South of France at first, but then again, it wasn't the place she was searching for, but the person. If she was here, at the freezing Minnesota, then there was nowhere else Sameen would like to be. She was grateful her mortal form came employed with the proper clothing to fight off the biting chill (not that she wasn't used to the cold, but she had to blend in).

Pushing her way inside the small shop, it only took her a second to locate her target. Blonde curls on a head higher than anyone else's around was the biggest pointer. Sameen was pleased to find warm cup of coffee and a plate of fresh pastries waiting for her. Human food held no sustenance quality for immortals, but she loved partaking them. After millennia of

ambrosia and nectar, she could do with the variety of flavors. She would never put it beyond the fair-haired woman to have predicted her arrival and knowing her favorite.

"*Bonjour*, Sameen."

Sameen nodded her head as a sign of acknowledgment. "Delphine," she said as she took a seat across her.

She was still not used to see the Pythia roaming about, but was glad that Apollo had come to his senses. It was about a damn time he created an immortal form for the Oracle of Delphi from the accumulation of the previous priestesses' souls instead of replacing each dead one every few years.

"I believe you're seeking for information from me," Delphine said.

Sameen rolled her eyes then, as if saying *if you know that then tell me already*. Delphine's smile never faltered, despite the glare she received. Sameen watched her sipping her coffee like she had all the time in the world and wouldn't be rushed by any demand placed upon her, not even when it was Hades' daughter.

Grumbling, Sameen took the opportunity to devour her pastry. Devour, as in popping the *religieuse* into her mouth then licking its mocha *ganache* off her fingers. Her unattractive table manner upset Delphine and it was the suited payback for stalling off from telling her what she wanted to know.

"Sameen..."

"Tell me. I'll be out of your hair after." Sameen's eyes wandered up at Delphine's ever-fluffy blonde curls, finding her words to be fitting and smirked to herself. "And cut off the riddles."

"Your object of fascination—" Delphine grinned when Sameen scoffed at her choice of words "—is not mortal."

"I've gathered as much. Can't see her lifespan, but it's there."

She shrugged, ignoring the way Myka had warned her to stay away from Root before she vanished. Annoyed with the current slow progress, she made a show of slurping her coffee and took pleasure from Delphine's visible flinch. If her father found out about her rudeness, he would punish her. Lucky for her, he was too busy making subtle death threat while giving erotic bath and feeding her mother with oysters, acorns, and snails. She didn't need to know which taste of her mother he was being particular about; she didn't even want to think about it.

"What is she?" Sameen asked with urgency, kicking the thought of her parents to the darkest corner of her mind. "A nymph?"

"A *semidea*."

It caught Sameen's attention. Since it wasn't possible to be a demigod when one's mother was the immortal part of the equation, she asked which God was Root's father and dreaded

her own father's name as the answer. That would explain certain things about the elusive woman and, to an unsettling extent, her enthrallment with her.

Delphine's eyes were unseeing. Hazel irises turned bright blue for a fleeting moment before she stared straight at Sameen. "Not your father for sure." Her smile widened. "It's for you to figure out, just like you have to find out her birth name first."

Sameen groaned. "I was hoping you'll help me with that too."

"Take it as a winter project."

"I'm not in any school." Sameen pointed out, irritated. "You are."

"It's better than partying on the tropical side of the world, *non*?" Delphine grinned even though Sameen glared at her. It turned into a frown moments later. "Myka warned you, didn't she?"

"Yeah... What's with that? She usually loves helping out all the other half-Gods."

"She's just looking out for you." Delphine's eyes wandered to somewhere behind Sameen for a second before she met her on the eye again. "It's time for you to go."

Only Delphine could make an order sound like a plea and for it to be heed without protest. Sameen was back on her feet. She flinched away, to no avail, when Delphine followed her action and leaned over the table separating them. The mixed smell of cigarette and sweet vanilla overwhelmed her senses as kisses landed on her cold cheeks, one after another, and she scowled. If Delphine wasn't a valuable asset for Apollo and any other Gods seeking for future prophesy, she would have sent her down to Hades right at the moment. She wasn't the only one objecting to the intimate contact this time.

"Hey..." A woman about Sameen's height interrupted, standing beside the table. "Sorry I'm late." She gained both of their attentions in that instant, her dreadlocks and red coat stood out among everything else. She stared at Delphine, who smiled back, to Sameen. "Hi! I'm Cosima." She had a toothy grin, tongue poking between rows of white teeth. "You are?"

"Just leaving."

"Okay...'just leaving'." Cosima even completed the remark with proper air quotes, numerous bracelets on her wrists tinkled along with the motion.

"Cheeky brat," Delphine said with feigned exasperation.

Despite her itch to leave, Sameen stayed on her spot. Her dark eyes trained over Cosima. It wasn't the inquisitiveness framed behind the glasses or the glint of her nose ring that had caught her attention. It was the Keres lingering behind her. Sameen noticed its strong scent of Disease, so Delphine must have too. And she did, because when Sameen turned to her with a questioning gaze, her smile faltered and she shook her head. Sameen sighed. Out of everyone in Olympus and Hades combined, Delphine was supposed to be one of the most

knowledgeable. She should have known that falling for a mortal would just give them, ageless beings, heartache.

“That’s not tots obvious,” Cosima said, sarcastic yet playful. She had noticed the silent exchange. “Like, not at all.”

Sameen ignored her then. With one last parting nod to Delphine, she walked away, beckoning the Keres to leave the couple and follow her back home. It was the least she could do to repay Delphine, because she wasn’t going to open a portal for her to visit Hades after this Cosima die. At times like this, Sameen was relieved that no one—be it mortal or Olympian—could waltz in and out of the Underworld on a whim.

Tired of not getting her answers, Sameen took matters on her own hands. As it turned out to be, all of a sudden taking tangible form in front of any mortal wasn’t the best course of action. Nor was throwing a parental-related question right afterward. Humans were delicate being, they didn’t like being taken on surprise, and Sameen learned it first hand as fire rang inside the ship she had found Root in.

“The Hell...”

She gawked at the hole on her chest; a hot bullet had lodged itself in her heart. The injury stung in a way a new piercing did. It wasn’t painful, but the impact was enough to force her to take a step back. Instead of blood, it was Ichor that began flowing out—gold and thick. It stained her blouse, contrasting with the black garment, before the flow stopped altogether. Almost as if in anger, the bullet was spitted out and the wound sealed back, leaving only a small tear rimmed with gold on her otherwise plain dark top. Once the healing process finished, Sameen stared at Root with incredulity. Her arm still stretched forward, finger ready on the gun’s trigger. She was aiming at her head this time.

“Oh.” Root tilted her head to one side, the beginning of a smile on her lips. “You are real.”

Chapter 3

“She can’t see you.” Root shrugged, putting her gun away. Sameen’s glare didn’t affect her. “Not all the time, but I do. I’m always able to see you.” A smile graced her lips at the quiet confession. “It’s been an argument between us, whether you’re real or just another figment of my delusion.”

Sameen’s brows furrowed further with each word Root said. “She?” she asked, skeptical.

“My God.”

Before Sameen could question which deity Root worshipped, her attention diverted to the movement behind her. She just had the chance to turn around before another gun was pointed at her. It belonged to a different person this time, the man in a nice suit. She didn’t bother to raise her arms, only glancing back at Root.

“I heard a shot,” the man said. His voice deep and his gaze didn’t wander from his target. “You okay?”

“Absolutely.”

“Who’s this?”

From the corner of her eyes, Sameen saw Root tilting her head to the right—the ear she was deaf on, the remainder of another brush with Death she managed to escape. Sameen could vanish right there and then, or even making her presence unseen for the man’s eyes, but she was curious of what Root’s explanation would be.

“Sameen Shaw.”

Much to Sameen’s surprise, it was indeed the name she had used during the last time she was on Earth.

Root winked at Sameen’s incredulous look. “Shaw—“ she savored the way the name rolled off her tongue and grinned at the pointed stare Sameen gave her as she motioned at the man with one hand “—this is John Reese.”

John spent another second before he lowered his gun and acknowledged Sameen with a stiff nod. She returned the gesture in kind. Unlike Root’s casual approach, the way he carried himself and the steadiness of his aim were enough telltale for her to recognize him as a fellow trained operative.

“Are you done yet?”

Root looked up from the computer she had began typing on while Sameen and John were doing the silent assessment of each other earlier. “A little bit more.”

“I’m doing another round,” John said and left without another word.

Once he was out of the room, Sameen marched up to Root with a look of annoyance all over her face. “Who the Hell are you?” She slammed her hands on the desk, rattling everything on it from the sheer force.

Root remained unfazed. If anything, her eyes lingered along the length of Sameen’s arms with unconcealed interest. “You can call me Root,” she said.

Sameen gritted her teeth, she knew that already. “How did you know my name?” Less than a minute ago, Root thought she was a part of her overactive imagination and she was adamant on keeping it at just that for now.

“She told me.” The noise of typing continued to fill the room—it hadn’t stopped even while Root wasn’t looking at the screen. “Once She saw your face, She ran the facial recognition program and located your files. She has been telling me about your impressive record ever since.” With the final tap on the enter key, Root finished off whatever she was doing. Her eyes twinkled with genuine reverence when it locked with Sameen’s narrowed ones. “Isn’t She the best?”

Sameen overlooked the borderline-manic grin Root sported. “Your God is a computer?”

Root chuckled. “An artificial intelligence.” She stood up from the swivel chair and gathered the gun. They were standing at arm length from each other, only the desk separating them. The smile Root had turned into a frown. “You asked me about my father, why?”

Sameen hated that she had to tilt her head up and gave her best defiant look to Root. “Just curious.”

“Who—*what* are you?”

There was a crease on Root’s forehead as she knitted her brows together. She lifted a hand with the intention of touching Sameen—to feel for herself if she was indeed real, despite everything that had transpired between them in the last minutes—but stopped short before she could. It was a little too forward, even for her.

“I’m the daughter of Hades.”

Sameen had answered with equal pride as when Root talked about her manmade God. In spite of her father’s notorious evil ways, she was proud of being one of his daughters. Because unlike Zeus, he didn’t sleep with every available female beings and have offspring everywhere and of every kind.

“As in the Greek God?”

Under normal circumstance, Root would have sneered at such ridiculous notion. She never believed in any kind of God that wasn’t tangible, but there had always been people and beings that others couldn’t see while she could and it had been giving her grief throughout her life. Then there was Sameen, who she had seen around a lot as of late. Sameen who was

pretty and strong, with gold blood and heart that could spit out a bullet. Sameen who had just nodded at her question and she was awed, because everything made sense at last.

“Why are you following me then, daughter of Hades?” Root couldn’t help but tease. The thought of Trojan being a very different thing for them was amazing. “I don’t mind having a goddess as my guardian angel, though.”

Sameen rolled her eyes. Root was as bad as Helena, if not worse. “I’m bored. You’re still not dead yet.”

“You want me dead?” There was an edge of laugh on Root’s question and the way the topic of Death didn’t bother her had irked Sameen even more. “You’re not the only one, Sam,” Root said with an easy smile. “Stay if you want, front seat of my death.”

Sameen considered the proposition. Now that Root was aware of her presence and her history while playing as human, there was nothing that kept her to continue stalking from the shadows. She had to ask, though. “What’s in it for you?” Root did realize that she was the Death God who would drag her soul down to Hades when she died and not some sort of a fluffy guardian angel, right?

“The fact that you’re real, and I’m not *that* insane, are good enough for me. But you can help. You get to shoot bad people—“ she rolled her eyes, as though a disappointing thought had just crossed her mind “—on the knees.” When Sameen didn’t respond, she walked around the desk to leave. “You know how to find me,” she said before steeping out of the room.

She contacted her boys first about the certain contrabands they had to pick, changing the amount from six to seven, although she didn’t think Sameen would need it—or even joined their ragtag team in the first place. Then John alerted her about their rendezvous spot outside, they had to leave before the docks workers arrived for the day. Her God’s voice in her ear guided her through the empty, dark corridors of the abandoned ship. It wasn’t long before another set of steps joined hers, echoing through the metal walls until it fell in tandem with her own.

“You’re in?”

Sameen shrugged, but kept walking with Root.

The drive back was comfortable, in a surprising way. John didn’t ask when he saw Sameen walked out with Root. He conceded the driver seat and settled for shotgun, leaving Root alone in the backseat of the black town car. They were halfway to John’s safe house when a call came to Root and they had to take another way to get to the new direction.

Instead of being annoyed with the sudden change, Sameen took it as a challenge. It only had been a year since the last time she drove, but the car was brand new and its overall system

had improved. She could feel the engine purring alive when she floored the gas and took them to their destination on the other side of the city in less than thirty minutes.

While they hadn't exchanged word again, her relationship with John was less straining than it was with Root and her flirty attitude. Even more after Sameen pulled the car to the curb with a screech of its wheels, slipping into a tight space between two other sedans and earned herself a crocked grin from him. Root snickered; she thought they were going to high-five or fist bump.

The closed, drafty library was the exact place Sameen had expected herself to be. She had seen Root there before, the man with a limp and glasses had kept her in something called a Faraday Cage downstairs. He was the one inhabiting the place most of the time, so she knew she would see him there. He hadn't noticed her yet, though, because she was walking behind Root with John on her side.

"We got a new number." The man did as much as sparing a glance at Root and John as he shuffled to stick a woman's picture on the board made of glass. Turning around, he saw Sameen looking at the other boards filled with more pictures and some newspapers cuts tacked on it. "Excuse me?"

Sameen didn't answer. She was too busy looking at her surrounding; it somehow reminded her of her father's quarter in the Underworld. John had gone down on some corridors so the man had to turn to Root, who had taken a seat on one of his desks again.

"Who is this, Miss Groves?"

Sameen's ears perked up at the name, but otherwise didn't show any sign that she had heard him.

"A friend?"

He didn't like her nonchalant answer. "What is she doing here?"

"Helping us take down Samaritan before it gets online, I hope."

"You hope?"

"Don't play coy, Harold. You know we're going to need all the help we can get if we ever want to walk out of this war alive."

"It doesn't mean you can recruit whoever you pleased."

"She's waiting for me to die."

"What?"

Root had one of those mysterious smiles Harold hated. "She's an ex-Marine with medical background, and I tried, but she can't die. Great deal in a pretty package, right?"

Harold didn't even know which part he should ask about. He opted to keep his mouth shut, giving the tiniest nod to show his acceptance of the new addition to their team.

"For a secret agency headquarter, this place sucks," Sameen said. She was done with scrutinizing her surrounding; only finding the bottle of bourbon on one of the bookshelves as the good point of the place. Her eyes were on Harold when she asked, "Where is the dog?"

"How do you even—"

Right on time, John came back with a brown-black Belgian Malinois on his heels. One look at Sameen and he sat. His tongue lolled out and tail wagged in anticipation against the hardwood floor, waiting for her next instruction.

Sameen bent on the knees and slapped her thighs. "Hey, boy! Come here, Bear, *hier*."

"He likes you," John said after observing their interaction for awhile. Bear had turned to lie on his back and Sameen was rubbing his belly. "Got one?"

"Three." Sameen grinned. Mortal dogs were small, unlike her own. "Three in one."

Root herded the men from questioning what Sameen had meant with a question of her own. "What did you need me for, Harry? You and the big lug always take care of the irrelevants."

"Unfortunately, we can't this time." Harold gave a pointed look at the number's mugshot picture. "What do you think about getting in female correctional facility, Miss Groves?"

"Seems everybody wants to lock me up." Sameen snorted, so Root wiggled her brows at her. "Or dead." She turned to Harold again, whose look of confusion seemed to be the permanent expression on his face for the day, and offered a playful smile. "As fun as that sounds, orange is not my new black. My dance card is full, Harry, She's going to need me somewhere else soon. Do you know if she's the victim or perpetrator yet?"

Harold pursed his lips.

"Do you want me to ask Her?"

There was a sparkle in Root's eyes, one that was similar to whenever Sameen teased Macaria while knowing their father would take her side instead of her sister's. It seemed to be a familiar occurrence between Harold and Root, because John didn't bother to intervene.

"Please," Harold said.

Root had a victorious grin that didn't last. The moment her God started talking in her ear, her playful look vanished. She appeared grim, but resolute more than anything else.

"Is something wrong?" Harold asked.

"Of all the wrong things in the world..." Root said in disgust. "You won't like this one, Harry. Sometimes it's better not to know."

For once, Harold did as she said and didn't pry further. "I presume you'll bring your...friend —" he glanced at Sameen, still uncomfortable with her presence and the way her eyes seemed to be able to pierce through his soul "—as backup?"

"Her name is Sameen Shaw." Root hopped off from the desk to join Sameen. "Let's go, Sam. We're gonna need pizza."

The Machine didn't even try to hide the fact that She was trying to woo Sameen or making her stay with the team—or maybe She was just being the clueless wingwoman for Root. Either way, She told them to walk a few blocks to some parking lot and they ended up with a sleek Bugatti. Sameen was once again behind the wheel and she asked to make another pit stop before they get pizza, to which Root later kind of regretted.

"A police station?"

"You can wait here," Sameen said. She was there only to pick up some things she had left from her other life before. "I won't be long."

Root wouldn't pass an opportunity to know more about Sameen—also the possibility of meeting more of her kind—and thus she followed her inside the twelfth precinct. She let her lead the way since she seemed to be confident on where she was heading. They got their visitor IDs and rode the elevator upstairs, where there were less uniformed cops and more detectives occupying the desks.

Sameen stopped beside a desk where two men were chatting while working through the paperwork. Both of them halted when they noticed her presence. Root was worried when the one wearing leather jacket stood up, the badge that he hung with chain around his neck swung from the sudden motion. He was looking as though he was going to arrest Sameen on the spot. Root almost grasped Sameen's arm to tug her away when he broke into a toothy grin.

"Reese!"

Root's eyes flew wide.

The other man, who was dressed in a nice suit, copied his partner and shook Sameen's hand. "It's so nice to have you back. What are you doing here?"

"I—"

"Is it another joint taskforce with LAPD?" the first man asked. His eyes wandered to Root and he wiggled his brows at Sameen—or Reese, as they had called her. "Is that your partner?"

“Yeah, Esposito, you could say that.” The men exchanged smiles with Root, but Sameen didn’t bother to do a proper introduction. She didn’t even know Root’s first name. “I’m here to see Beckett. Ryan—“ she addressed the man in suit “—is she around?”

“You didn’t know?” Esposito hooked his thumb on the direction of captain’s office. “Beckett’s captain now.”

Sameen recognized the woman sitting behind the desk, although said woman was too preoccupied with her own paperwork to notice. She thanked them before going to the office. Root trailed behind her, feeling intrigued and a little out of place.

“*Reese*?” Root asked, incredulous.

“Detective Dani Reese, LAPD.” Sameen smirked, cocking up a taunting brow. “Your all-knowing other half didn’t tell you?”

“No.” Root frowned. She glanced at the direction of the precinct’s surveillance camera, but The Machine stayed quiet in her ear. “She didn’t know.”

The information left Sameen feeling triumphant as she knocked on the open door. *Captain Kate Beckett* plastered on the glass that made up the upper half of the door. The noise jarred Kate from her work. Her reaction when she saw Sameen was pretty much the same as the men’s earlier. She ushered Sameen and, with slight hesitance, Root into her office, closing the door and blinds behind her.

“Hey.”

Sameen chuckled, Kate’s wariness of Root was too obvious. “It’s okay. She knows.”

“Oh.”

Kate smiled again at Root, more genuine and less forced. There was curiosity in the way she stared at her before she nodded at herself, satisfied with whatever she had found. Root had scrutinized back. She wondered whether Kate was someone of Sameen’s caliber or just another being amongst the Greek mythology she never heard of.

“The usual?” Kate asked Sameen.

“Yeah.”

Kate rounded her desk. She unlocked her bottom drawer and took out a golden badge and gun, placing both items on the table for Sameen to take. She thanked her for keeping them as she clipped the badge on her belt and tucked the gun into her coat pocket. Sameen trusted Myka the most, but she worked on a secret warehouse facility that used some disgusting purple goo that she didn’t want to be anywhere near her belongings.

Unlike when Delphine kissed her cheeks, Sameen didn’t avoid the contact when Kate went to hug her. She even returned it, one arm wrapped around Kate to give reluctant pats on her back. After all, among their huge, incestuous family, Artemis was her favorite cousin.

“Is she your human?” Kate asked in a whisper.

“Not really.”

Not really because Root was only half-human and not really because Sameen didn’t know. Kate took it as a good answer, though. She squeezed Sameen one more time before pulling away from the embrace.

“I’m proud of you.”

Sameen rolled her eyes. Just because Kate had her human spouse and the ring to go with it, didn’t mean she would too. Also, just because she was the youngest of Hades’ offspring, didn’t mean her cousins should treat her like a child forever. It had been centuries, for Zeus’ sake.

“Whatever. I gotta go.”

Kate gave an odd, encouraging smile to Root and a stern stare at Sameen. “I don’t want to see you around here,” she said in a warning. Family or not, having a Death God around her precinct was a bad premonition.

Sameen slammed the door shut in reply.

They picked the pizza from a joint several blocks away with little hassle, at least from Sameen’s part. Root had gone to the convenience store beside it to purchase a roll of foil under The Machine’s order. She came back just in time to overhear Sameen’s order and tasted bile in her mouth just from hearing the amount of olive she had demanded to be put on her half of pizza. Root assumed it was a Greek God thing. The excited look on Sameen’s face was worth the sick feeling in her stomach and she swallowed her comment. It was easy to indulge when Sameen was grinning at her like that.

Then they continued driving for a while. The car smelt of cheese and olive as they ate through their share. Litchfield Penitentiary was located in upstate New York, near Albany, but they weren’t going to the prison itself. Halfway through the only road that led to it, Root told Sameen to pull over and pop the hood. She explained what they were going to do when the number arrived and Sameen had to hide until then.

Just as Root had said, less than ten minutes later a white van came to a stop in front of their car. Broken sport car and a woman in distress were most men’s weaknesses, regardless of the season. A man came out of the van. His dark jacket was unzipped, showing off the blue correctional officer uniform underneath. Chest puffed out and hair combed back, slick with hair gel. A grin stretched over his hairy face. He was polite and sweet as he offered assistance to Root, who knew better and turned him down.

“Why are you smiling at me?” he asked, uneasy.

Root smiled wider. “I’m not smiling at you.”

She was smiling at Sameen, who had rounded the van to stand behind the man. She tapped him on the shoulder. When he turned around, confused and surprised, her fist greeted his face. Then her knee met his crotch and he fell down with a groan. Having noticed Sameen’s sneaking, his driver had stepped out of the van as well. Her small figure bundled up in standard prison jacket, khaki-colored uniform peeked out from the collar—she was the number. She shrieked when the man fell. Sameen had to knock her out too.

“This is why we brought pizza, Sam,” Root said in exasperation. “So you didn't have to do that to her.”

“Everybody’s a critic today.” Sameen rolled her eyes. First the pizza worker reminding her about the health hazard of her apparent ‘obsessive consumption’ of olive, and now Root. As if she would let the number screech her ears off. “Let’s just get this over with.”

Root moved the unconscious number into the van. She secured a zip tie around her wrists, just as precaution, and waited with her inside while Sameen dragged the man away. It wasn’t long before the number’s eyes fluttered open. Root already had a hand covering her mouth then.

“Maritza Ramos?”

The young woman looked even more terrified, forgetting the fact that she had her nametag on. Root smiled a little to put her on ease.

“Can you not scream this time?” Root felt movement under her palm. From the way Maritza narrowed her eyes, she knew that she had tried to bite her but the glove stopped the attack. Root sighed, shaking her head. With her free hand, she pointed at the dashboard. “I have pizza for you. No screaming?”

Maritza was quick to nod. Her guarded stance relaxed after Root cut off the zip tie and handed her the box, along with the stack of paper towels on top of it. She let out a low moan when the glorious smell of warm pizza invaded her nostrils as she opened the lid. It was heaven and she wished Flaca was there to share it with her.

Flaca couldn’t get out, even with her mother’s illness, but Maritza could bring pieces of the world outside with her—it was the reason she enlisted to be the van driver in the first place. On the first run, C.O. Coates was nice enough to promise her to get doughnuts from the shop he worked at, making the job more appealing. But this pizza was way better than the doughnuts. It was good pizza, American and shit.

The thought of seeing Flaca smile again after brooding throughout the week got her grinning. She could fit two slices in her pocket, but she wanted to bring more, at least half of what she got. She was pondering whether she should just slip the whole box under her shirt and risked being caught for walking like a flat-chested robot, when Root handed her a roll of foil.

“I don’t do no drug like that,” Maritza said, eyeing Root in wary. Being given pizza didn’t erase the fact that Sameen had used the sleeper hold on her. “Only pot.”

“It’s for the pizza. You want to bring back some, right?”

Maritza snatched the roll, biting her cheeks to stop herself from saying *shit, woman, you’re creepy as fuck*. Root left her to it after she told her to eat while waiting. She locked the doors the moment Root closed it and watched until she vanished behind the trees on the side of the road. Maritza should have just driven the hell away from there, but her attention went back to the pizza.

She set aside four slices, wrapping each in the foil. Two went in her jacket pockets, the other two would go in her prison-issued granny bra. It left her with four more to devour. She was on her third slice when the screaming began. She froze mid-chew; grease smeared her fingers and lips. She had forgotten about C.O. Coates, but she was pretty sure it was him.

It was him, alright. Maritza had saved up her pizza in the van and followed the noise into the thin woods. She was always the curious ones, getting herself in trouble a lot. This time she was glad she had kept her distance when the situation revealed itself before her.

Sameen had stripped Coates off his tops and tied his arms around a tree. She was saying something next to his ear, probably threatening to do unspeakable things if he didn't cooperate. Root whipped out a phone and started recording as he confessed to his crime, in fear of Sameen’s threat of castrating him next. He apologized and begged and sobbed. Root tasered him until he was unconscious again and the video still went straight to the internet for the world to see.

Maritza’s stomach turned from the sight and the realization that Big Boo and Pennsatucky were telling the truth. She had brushed them off, thinking it was just another white girls being dramatic and Pennsatucky was jealous because her seizure forbid her from doing the fun drive away from that stinkass prison. Relief washed over her as the magnitude of the fate she had just escaped made itself known. Her sigh must have come out too loud, now that Coates was no longer crying, because Root and Sameen turned to her.

Instead of thanking them, “I should be callin’ the cops on your ass,” was what she said.

Sameen flashed the badge on her belt, smirking. “I am a cop.”

Maritza stared at her and then at Root, who acted way too relaxed despite everything, and concluded that the two were just batshit crazy.

“You should head back now,” Root said.

“What about him?”

“He is staying.”

Maritza was conflicted. Now that she knew, she wanted nothing but to stay far, far away from C.O. Coates—and the two women, if she was being honest. They were on a whole another

level of crazy. Crazier than Crazy Eyes and they didn't even look like it, which was a big mindfuck for her. She was sure if she left him with them and he ended up dead, she would be charged for being an accessory or something. That was more years away from Juliana. She might be shit mother and all, but she couldn't afford that.

"It's okay, we won't kill him," Root said, having noticed the troubled look on Maritza's face. "You should go back to get help for him."

"What would I tell them?"

"The truth."

"That a bitch waved us down with engine problem and another badass one knocked us out with some kind of martial arts?"

"Exactly." Root didn't comment on the lack mention of pizza.

"Right, whatever." Maritza rolled her eyes. She turned around to leave, but stopped short. "Thanks, you know, for the pizza," she said over her shoulder and resumed the walk back to the van.

Root saw the tail of the prison van vanishing up the road as Sameen and she went to their car. It would be a while before the man got hypothermia and Maritza should be back with help by then. Although no amount of help could fix his future. His entire life was ruined already because Root had uploaded his confession on his own social media. Pleased with the outcome of the mission, they settled inside the car like they did before. Root blasted the heat once Sameen turned on the car.

"So is this what you do?" Sameen asked. They hadn't yet driven away. "Stopping people from getting assaulted and bringing them food?"

"No. This is Harold and John's job. Mine involves more shooting."

Sameen hummed. "What's next?"

Root detected the uninterested tone in Sameen's voice. While ruining a bad man's life was satisfying, it might not be good enough to make her stay longer. She had lived for a very long time and as a Death God, she must have seen worst. Still, somehow, Root wanted to impress her—wanted to make that thick, gold blood of hers rushed with whatever equivalent of adrenaline for Gods.

Lucky for Root, The Machine sent her another number. A relevant this time. She couldn't hide her excitement as she opened her laptop and searched for the number's identity. It came right up and she showed it to Sameen first. After all, she had said that there would be shooting people involved.

"You might get to shoot them this time."

Instead of that grin she had expected to see again, Sameen furrowed her brows. Root thought maybe she had spoken too fast when she too saw the number's picture. It was of a blonde-

haired girl, a teenager, who didn’t look like a threat to national security that needed to be put down.

“Clarke Griffin." Sameen frowned. “Your God wants us to shoot a kid?”

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Jus drein jus daun: “blood must have blood”

Hodnes laik kwelnes: “love is weakness”

Clarke Griffin was considered the new, better, and bisexual version of Serena van der Woodsen, or so Gossip Girl had dubbed her. Straight A’s student. Valedictorian. She received several college acceptance letters, even one from the Ivy Leagues. To top it off, she was also an active environmental activist who aspired to be a doctor. She lived in the dream life, until her father’s sudden death a couple of months ago. Everything went downhill from there.

The last update from the pesky Upper East Side rumor blog said that the princess had fallen off from the sky, shedding off her designer dresses and heels for leather jacket and boots. Clarke was involved in some youth gang called Trikru, before she fell off the radar. With no lead of the girl, it took Root and Sameen an entire day to locate her. When they found her, she was way off Manhattan.

“It’s not the whole gang,” Sameen said. Root and she were spying on Clarke from a booth on the other side of the diner. Just in time, Clarke leaned forward to peck the young woman in front of her on the cheek. “It’s just the leader she’s involved with.” Sameen snickered.

“Our girl has been making interesting friends since her father died.” Root slid over the laptop so Sameen could see the information Root had dug out from cloning Clarke’s phone. Among those were a couple of candid pictures. “Hacktivists.”

“Do you know them?”

“Skye? Not personally.” Root shrugged. “We tried getting in S.H.I.E.L.D. around the same time. They captured her. I was trying to steal the T.A.H.I.T.I. Protocol through their director, but Harold caught me first.” She pouted. “Do you know how hard it was to learn cello? My fingers hurt for days.”

Sameen only raised a brow, unimpressed, and pointed at the other picture on the screen. “And the blonde?”

Root grinned this time. “I know Nomi. We ran into each other once, back when she was still Michael. Maybe I can ask her, find what our girl has been up to.” She moved the laptop back to her and began typing.

Sameen left Root to do whatever she was doing and kept an eye on Clarke, but the girl hadn’t done anything wicked, except maybe for making the Trikru leader flustered every so often.

Overall it was a boring stakeout. Sameen played with the crumbles of apple pie on her empty plate, considering on ordering the banana chocolate chip pancake next. Might as well have breakfast for dinner if she was going to watch the number and the Trikru leader making googly eyes at each other all night long.

She was jarred out of her thought when Root scooted closer. Their shoulders and thighs pressed against each other, their bare forearms brushed, and she tensed up. Root was saying something about Lexa, the Trikru leader, but it was all background noise for her. The thrill of Death had wrecked through her spine for a split second, shocking her like an electric zap.

Startled, Sameen swept her gaze around the diner to pinpoint the source. 1946 New York had set her expectation high. She remembered following Margaret "Peggy" Carter, who had just appointed as a hero and would enter the Elysium upon Death, to an L&L Automat. She was granted the chance to watch Peggy threatened to kill a man with a fork after he was being rude to the waitress, who she had assumed as Peggy's gal pal. Too bad, she was in for a disappointment this time. There was no vintage gal pals, no Keres, no threat of Death or injury happening in her immediate vicinity, not even a paper cut. Only Root.

"She united twelve smaller gangs and created the Trikru. Like father, like daughter. Elias must be so proud of her. She started off the City of Light, a candle shop, last—" Root stopped short the moment Sameen's hand covered hers above the touchpad. She looked up to find Sameen staring back at her, brown eyes rimmed in gold. "What are you doing?" she asked.

Sameen blinked. Her eyes went back to its normal color and she disconnected their hands. "Just testing somethin'."

The thrill of Death was indeed coming from their connected skin. It only happened when she came in contact with a certain kind of Gods, the same one her father and his offspring tended to be attracted to. She relaxed back on the seat, hiding her smirk from Root's questioning stare with the rim of her coffee cup. She had a good guess on who Root's father was, but it didn't matter anymore.

Root wanted to ask—about the change of color on Sameen's eyes and the goose bumps on her arm when she held her hand—but she didn't know the exact question to ask and wasn't sure she would like the answer, so she kept quiet. The Machine chimed in her ear served as a good distraction from her current dilemma. She did Her instruction, packing the laptop back into her bag and putting on her jacket and leaving enough cash to pay for their meal plus the tips under her empty cup.

Sameen took it as a sign for them to leave and slipped out of the booth. She shrugged into her own jacket as she followed Root outside to the black van—their chosen stolen vehicle for the day. Root put her bag inside the car, locked the door, and started walking away on the sidewalk. She was still listening to The Machine when Sameen caught up with her.

"Where are we headed to now?"

"Down the block."

“Just to confirm—“ Sameen stepped out of the way of a group of teenagers, getting closer to Root in the process “—you don’t know why we should stop this girl, only that we do.”

“Honestly? Most of the time I’m told what to do a second before I have to do it.” Root’s smile widened. “The big picture, that’s Hers.”

“So you’re what? A prophet?”

“I guess you could say that.”

Root shrugged. She heard her God’s voice and did her biddings, but she never considered herself as something as grandeur, yet silly, as a prophet. She didn’t have the correct sex or look the part or any mountain-moving, rain-causing abilities, beside hacking and a decent marksmanship. Analog Interface suited her much better.

Sameen shook her head at Root’s dismissive attitude. “Hope that voice in your head knows what it’s doing.”

They turned right before they reached the end of the block. Root slowed down so she could talk with Sameen without running into any trash cans lining the narrow alley. “She warned me not to ask, but I have to,” she said, catching the sight of the surveillance camera mounted on the mouth of the alleyway they had entered. “Can you kill a rivaling God?”

“Of yours?”

Root nodded. “It’s called Samaritan.”

“That’s better than The Machine.” Sameen smirked at Root’s offended expression. “No. We don’t interfere with Fate.”

“And yet you saved me.”

“We can get away with small things. Kicking a lousy God-wannabe’s ass off the face of the Earth and changing the Fates of so many people isn’t one of ‘em.”

Root had predicted as much. It was all too *deus ex machina* for Sameen, a real Goddess, to come out of nowhere and be Her champion and win the war before it even began—that only happened in fictions. But still, she sighed in disappointment.

They passed through a shared parking lot and took another turn into a smaller alley. After awhile of walking in silence, Root came to a stop in front of the red backdoor of a two-story building that didn’t appear any different than the other three surrounding it. Sameen furrowed her brows as she stared up at the building. The lights were off inside.

“Okay, so you don’t know what we’re doing. Can you at least tell me what we’re doing next?”

Root took out the torsion wrench and pick from her jacket and handed them to Sameen. She noted the way she stilled when her fingertips grazed her palm. “Breaking and entering.”

Sameen's expression brightened. She did a quick work on the lock and within seconds, the door creaked open. Root had to use her flashlight to help her see her way inside, but Sameen, who was born and lived in the darkness of the Underworld, moved around with ease.

It turned out to be the backroom of City of Light, a door-less threshold connecting it to the front area. Sameen peeked out, but found nothing of interest. Root shone her flashlight along the shelves that lined up the wall of the backroom, most filled with boxes. Different bottles containing essential oils and crayons were on the cabinet beside the blackboard. It was hung on the wall next to the open doorstep, containing recipes of scented candles written in chalk and doodles of flowers drawn between the lines. There was a long table in the middle of the room, with stove, pots, candles, and more wax flakes on it. Sameen lifted a glass container with blue candle inside and took a sniff.

"Unless it's a front for drug business and money laundering, like that Bubbles soap store, it's squeaky clean," Root said as she closed yet another box of candles. "Did you find anything?"

Sameen didn't respond, so she walked over to her. Ever since she initiated the hand-holding at the diner, Root had taken the gesture as a permission to touch. Nothing scandalous, though. She grasped on the side of her arms and peered over her shoulder. Sameen smelt like damp earth after rain, like the fallen leaves layering the forest floor and the seeds struggling to grow underneath. Death and Life—Root thought it was fitting as she sucked in a deep breath. She watched her gathering more scented candles and then spreading her hand over the table. A dark hole—so black it seemed infinite—opened up under her palm and the candles fell through it.

"Can you do that with people?" Root asked, her eyes wide in amazement.

"Yeah." Sameen lifted her hand and the portal closed off as if it was never there. She noticed their close proximity, glaring at Root as she took a step to the side. "Don't even think about how handy it is. Mortal can't stand the transfer." She frowned, remembering that little boy she had sent through to save him from an avalanche. It wasn't his time to die, even though it was his parents'. The transfer had saved his life, but knocked him out for days. "Every action has consequences. If I disturb Fate too much, the Moirai will be hunting my ass."

Root had a thoughtful look on. "How about inanimate objects? Can you send it, but not to the Underworld?"

Sameen wasn't even surprised Root knew where she was sending those candles. Her quarter could use more light and nice scent. "Sure," she said. "What do you want me to move?"

"Those boxes containing plain candles." Root motioned at the tall piles of cardboard boxes on the corner. "She said we might need them later. Can you transport them to the van, please?"

Sameen walked up to where the boxes was. This time the hole opened up under her feet, bigger than before. Root felt the room temperature dropped a little. A stomp of Sameen's heel and they were gone, but it wasn't the vanishing boxes that piqued their attention. Sameen tapped her foot down on where the boxes were and the hollow sound was louder this time.

They exchanged a stare before getting on their knees, running their hands and knocking along the wooden floor to find the secret compartment. Root found a small gap, just enough to stick in a finger, and did it to lift a section of the floor. Sameen grasped on the loosened floorboard and finished yanking it off for Root. Root's flashlight illuminated the surface of the black case hidden under. Sameen picked it up, placing it on the table. It wasn't heavy, but it had two shiny padlocks securing the sides. Whatever that was inside, it was obvious that it was pretty important.

"What the Hell does *jus drein jus daun* supposed to mean?" Sameen asked with a hint of annoyance. She was fluent in a lot of languages, but this one didn't fit into any of them. It seemed to be some sort of warning, considering that it was painted over the top of the case in red.

"I can run a program to translate it, so we can guess what's inside," Root said. Before she could do anything, Sameen had twisted the padlocks until the solid steel bent and snapped. "Or that works too." She quirked a brow in amusement at her impatience.

Inside were knives, a couple of baroque daggers, and clumps of what seemed to be cut-off braided-hair. After setting the cables aside, they came face to face with a jar filled with pink liquid—hydrazine, Sameen had identified it—and the sound of a gun's safety being taken off.

"Step away from the table," Clarke said, stepping through the threshold with a gun in her hand.

Sameen rolled her eyes. As of late, it seemed to be a common occurrence for her to be held at gunpoint. She had reached and raised her own at Clarke's direction as well. It was done out of instinct—the result of her training as a cop and Marine, rather than as an act of self-defense.

"Wanna see who's got better aim?"

All of a sudden, another presence crept out from the dark and made itself known. Lexa come up from behind Sameen, holding a knife against her throat. "I don't think so," she said. "Put the gun down."

Root sighed. She hadn't bothered to take out her own guns. She could do that and shoot the two girls faster than they could blink. She had a good reason to do that, but she refrained from doing so. The Machine must have seen them coming. She must have known if Lexa insisted on checking on her candles before they went home, and yet She didn't alert her of their interruption before it happened. Sometimes it was better not to know, but this time she was sure She wanted her to ask and find out for herself.

"Use your words, kids," Root said, raising her arms in surrender. "Sorry, Sam." She gave an apologetic smile to Sameen. "You have to keep it down this time."

When Sameen turned to her, Lexa snatched her gun. Clarke switched on the light while Lexa checked for more weapons from the women. She got two more guns and a stungun from Root and a knife from Sameen, and also a couple of zipties that she used to secure their wrists. Root pouted after she was forced to sit on one of the stools, Sameen beside her, while Clarke

continued pointing her gun at them. It wasn't how she imagined her first time being tied up with Sameen would be.

"They sent you, didn't they?"

"Who?" Root asked.

"The Ark. Thelonious Jaha."

Sameen snorted. "We have no idea what you're talkin' about."

Clarke didn't buy it. "I saw it in the recording my dad made. He planned to go public before they killed him and staged it as a car accident. He had proofs of what the Ark did on Maple. The air pollution, the waste dump, the increase of cancer case."

Her hand trembled and she steadied it with her free hand. Months ago, she had never seen a gun in her life, let alone holding one. Now she had acquired her own, albeit through illegal means. She hoped these women wouldn't be her first victims—that was a bridge she couldn't walk back once she crossed it. She was glad Lexa was there with her. Lexa, who had stable hands and very good with the daggers and knew the best sites to dump bodies. Clarke gulped her nervousness away.

"I know about the new facility they built in Maine and I'm not letting it happen again," she said.

"This is why she wanted me here," Root said in a whisper, glancing at the ceiling even though there was no surveillance camera in sight.

"You want to avenge him?" Sameen asked. It was getting ridiculous—humans were ridiculous. "With a bomb?"

"No! My priority is with the living, not the dead."

Clarke had Raven assembled and tinkered with the bomb. *Stick this part into that part and you're good to go* was what Raven had said. She didn't understand the fine mechanical details, but she had made sure it would be a contained explosion. Finn and Titus would plant it on Saturday night and it would go off on early Sunday, no one would get hurt. No one should get hurt.

"It's only to destroy the Ark's server room and stop them from using the new facility."

Root scoffed. "You really have no idea what you're caught up in, do you? Who that facility is actually for?"

"I—"

"That's enough, Clarke," Lexa said with finality. "I'll call Titus. He will take care of them. We proceed with the plan, our fight is not over."

Lexa stepped over to the front of the store. From the backroom, they could hear her talking in hushed tone, but she didn't come back after it ended. Root was too busy hearing the information The Machine was whispering in her ear to care much about anything else.

"I can retrieve that video for you," Root said a moment later. "Along with the proofs."

"You can't, nobody can. It's been wiped clean. Skye and Nomi—"

"Are not me." Root's lips curled up in a smirk. "They don't have a God—" she glanced at Sameen and her smirk got even more smug "—*two* Gods on their side."

Sameen huffed, rolling her eyes. She had been waiting for any sign from Root. A twitch and she would snap the flimsy ziptie off from her wrists and give a lesson to these two girls. But the signal never came and she had to sit through Root and Clarke trying to bore her to Death with their talking while the plastic digging on her skin.

"Why should I trust you?"

"You shouldn't. Just like how I don't trust the girl whose tenth birthday's wish was to join Doctors without Borders had grown up into a terrorist."

Clarke gaped. "How did you know that?" Her voice was weak and she lowered her gun without thinking.

"Clarke?" Lexa called, coming back into the backroom with a bald man in tow.

Lexa's voice snapped Clarke out of her trance. She let her take the gun off from her trembling hand and set it away on the table. "People changed," she said, squeezing on Lexa's arm. "I do what I have to do."

"*Hodnes laik kwelnes*." The words felt thick on Root's tongue, but she was only repeating what The Machine told her to say. Her pronunciation didn't seem to be a problem because whatever the phrase had meant, both girls and the man understood it. She stared straight at him. "Isn't it right, Titus?"

The man remained silent. Clarke and Lexa turned to face him.

"Titus here is going to leave your friend Finn to die in the explosion," Root continued. "Do you know who's directly connected to him and the hydrazine? Raven, and Clarke."

"Titus, what is this about?" Clarke asked.

In answer, he took out a gun from his coat and pointed it at her. "I'm sorry it had to come to this, Clarke. Truly I am. Lexa is never going to execute her duty while you live." His finger hovered on the trigger.

Although Lexa was surprised with the sudden turn of event, she stepped in front of Clarke to shield her with her body. Sameen was so done with the whole teenage drama with the sides of explosive and backstabbing. She stood up, snapped the ziptie off from her wrists and shoved the two girls out of the way, right when Titus pulled the trigger. The bullet caught her on the

abdomen. She staggered backward, grabbed the gun from the table and shot him once on each knee. He fell down with a loud cry. Root didn't waste her time to move forward and kick his gun away.

Clarke reached over for Sameen, trying to check on her injury, but her hand got swatted away. Sameen dipped her fingers into the wound. She pinched the bullet between her thumb and forefinger, pulling it out and speeded up the healing process. The girls were staring at her with disbelief.

"I'm wearing a vest."

Lexa, who did searches on them earlier, frowned. "No, you didn't."

Sameen glared at her. "Yes, I do." She tossed the bullet away. Root was smirking at her. The girls couldn't see the Ichor on her fingertips or how it smeared the inside of Root's wrists after she broke off her bind, but Root did and she liked how the gold dusted her skin. "Now you—" Sameen locked her eyes with Clarke's "—let Root help you. Give up on your bomber career and go back to school. Be a doctor, defeat some robot overlord, or whatever." When Clarke nodded, she turned to Lexa. "And you."

"Yes?"

"Do you have candles that don't smell like flowers? Something like food... Steak, maybe?"

To Root and Clarke's surprise (and utter disgust), Lexa said yes with an enthusiastic grin. That was how Sameen ended up with a smaller box filled with odd scented candles, which she had teleported to the Underworld the moment they were out of the store. Root had succeeded in retrieving a copy of Jake Griffin's confession video and all the necessary proofs related to it, in return for the hydrazine and Clarke's promise to forget about the new facility in Maine. She had everything related to the facility erased so it wouldn't come up when Clarke uncovered the Ark's evil deeds. Lexa would take care of Titus and since he didn't have any hair to be cut off, they weren't so worried about him.

They were walking back to their van when another number came.

"We've got a relevant number in Alaska," Root said, beaming at Sameen. "We're gonna steal a jet."

"Now that does sound kind of fun."

The numbers that followed up was even better. It was not every year Sameen got to beat up a militia group in Anchorage—or more like blowing up their headquarter with the hydrazine bomb they had confiscated from Clarke. They hopped a plane to Miami on the next morning

to pay a visit to Sonny and his crew. He should go back to dealing coke; it was a lot safer than moving explosives.

Then it happened.

It must be the heat. And the way Root stripped off her coat and jacket and gloves on the plane. And the way she leaned beside the doorway, eyes dark as she followed Sameen's every move while she beat up the men in the bar. And the way the drink tasted sweet and bitter on their tongues as they kissed.

Not one to play coy, Sameen had made the first move. She halted less than an inch before her lips met Root's, giving her the space and time to pull away if she wanted to. Root's breath stuttered when it caressed Sameen's face. She leaned forward, just a little, until their noses brushed. Sameen's smirked at her hesitance, even though she was gripping on her arms like it was the only thing that anchored her in the moment.

Sameen took the final step to close the space between them, pressing their lips together. She moaned when the familiar thrill wrecked throughout her body, the sensation increased at least tenfold with lust in the mix. Root smiled back to it. Her hands came up to the back of Sameen's neck to bring her closer as she deepened the kiss.

Sameen rose from her stool to stand between Root's parted legs, bending a bit to keep their mouths intact. Her hands grasped on Root's sides, before them, along with her whole body, lowered down and lifted Root up from her seat with ease. She crossed the room with Root attached on her—lips and arms and legs—until Root's back hit the wall and she whimpered into the kiss. Sameen kept them there, pressing against the yellow-wallpapered wall beside the potted palm tree.

She felt it before she saw it—the unmistakable coldness under her soles and the black mist that coiled out of the hole, scaling up her jeans-clad legs and calling her back home. Root didn't, as her legs were still perched on Sameen's hips and hands holding up her thighs. She did, however, groan when Sameen pulled back and broke the kiss.

Cussing under her breath, Sameen closed the portal to the Underworld with a stomp of her heel and sucked on the skin of Root's collarbone so the question she had wanted to ask came out as unintelligible moan instead. She hadn't and didn't want to think about it—about how her subconscious had wanted to bring Root to Hades where it was cold and dark and her bed was made of real clouds with sheet a great contrast of golden silk and how good Root would look while grasping on it.

While Root was indeed a half-God, she was no Heracles. His visit to Hades was a onetime thing. A living being was still not accepted there, even more when Root didn't bring proper gift for the Queen of the Underworld. Still, Sameen had to agree with the objection of taking Root right where they were. A bar full of knocked out men lying about wasn't the worse she had done, but there was this nagging in her gut that bugged her so much that she had to stop, *again*. For once, Root's annoyance matched hers and she smiled at the look of frustration she was giving her.

Hair mussed and lips swollen and skin bruised, Sameen thought Root looked even more beautiful. “You may wanna hold tighter,” she said against her ear, grazing the shell with her teeth.

“What—“

They fell through another portal Sameen had summoned. It didn’t last for more than a second, but Root was clinging on her for her dear life. Her half-God blood kept her from passing out, but it took awhile before the nausea settled down. Once she overcame the surprise, she noticed the place Sameen had brought them to.

“Where are we?”

“My bedroom,” Sameen said, grinning. She wasn’t able to bring Root to Hades, but she had other residences on Earth. “At least the one on this state.”

Root hummed as she gazed over Sameen’s shoulder, taking her time to observe her surrounding as she continued playing with the soft hair on the nape of Sameen’s neck. Her back was up against a massive window this time. She heard the sound of waves, even tasted the saltiness in the air. They were still somewhere in Miami, The Machine told her, just closer to the beach.

The walls were plain white and the bedcover a shade darker than her purple sleeveless top. Aside from the bed and the dark brown cedar chest on its foot, the room was bare of any furniture. She couldn’t help but wonder about how many people Sameen had brought here, only for the purpose of bedding them. The thought gave an uncomfortable pinch on her stomach, so she crashed their lips together, sinking her teeth on Sameen’s bottom lip until it busted and gold painted her own.

The heat licked their skin, just as arousal itched them to get out of their clothes. Root didn’t understand why Sameen couldn’t just will her clothes away or something, but she did have fun ripping them off. She was already naked when Sameen put her down on the bed—gentler than she had expected—and she inched up until her head hit a pillow.

Sameen’s hurried action of kicking off her boots and pants halted when she caught the movement of Root’s hand. It started from her side, caressed the flat of her stomach, and traced the jut of her hip. Then she cupped herself, biting her lip to tame down the moan as her fingertips skimmed along the length of her folds.

Sameen glared at the taunting display. If not for the thrill of Death’s constant presence—though it had subsided into a low, pleasant hum—then she would have believed that Root, with all her flirty attitude and teasing tendency, was Aphrodite’s offspring instead. After peeling off the last clothing article from her body, she climbed into the bed and slipped between Root’s legs.

She snatched off the teasing hand and brought it up. Her nostrils flared when she caught the heady smell of Root’s arousal. She took the glistening fingers into her mouth, licking and sucking them clean while Root watched her with heavy-lidded eyes. She tasted like human and goddess and something else that made Sameen’s chest clenched as erratic as her lower

stomach did. She bit on Root's knuckles as punishment for making her felt that way, but Root only moaned louder, bucking up her hips and spreading wetness over her navel. Root's fingers left her mouth with a slick popping noise. She kissed her again, all tongue and teeth.

Their breasts smoothened against each other and Root felt the mattress dipped even further under her back. Hand between her legs and mouth on her chest, Sameen was touching her on all the right places. She regretted that it might be their first and last time together, but the thought left her mind when lips latched on the peak of her breast and fingers dipped deep inside her. Sameen had moved to straddle one of her thighs to give her hand the space to move and she used the opportunity to grab on her ass. She pulled her down, drawing up her leg. Wet heat coated her skin as she guided her to grind against her thigh.

They went on like that for awhile, before Root got frustrated with the slow pace Sameen set. Reaching down between their bodies, she grabbed on her wrist and urged her to go faster, but she wouldn't budge. Her hold on her wrist became a vice-like grip. Blunt nails dug into the skin until sticky gold bubbled from underneath.

Sameen didn't give in to the silent plea. As much as she wanted to, she was aware that she could hurt Root. However, Root was not having any of her concern. The hand on her wrist trailed up her arm to her upper back, where Root proceeded to scratch along the length of her back, over and over again. Gold caked under Root's nails after each scratch healed and Sameen was hissing in pain against her shoulder.

Eventually, Sameen relented. She bit on the fleshy part on Root's shoulder until the skin broke and her lips dripped with red instead of gold. It was a bad idea, because it affected her harder than when their skin touched. Her eyes glowed, brown obscured by crimson and gold and she growled at the sudden change. She picked up the pace, fingers curled up with each thrust and thumb pressing at where Root needed the most. It wasn't long before Root arched off from the bed, eyes clenched tight and lips parted in a silent cry as the world burst into nothingness behind her eyelids.

Sameen's eyes were still tinted in gold when Root flipped them over. She saw the blood on her shoulder and went to chase the drop. Root wouldn't let her. Planting a firm hand on the center of Sameen's chest, she pushed her down on the bed. She wiped the blood with the pad of her forefinger and pressed it against Sameen's bottom lip, down to her chin and neck and abdomen. Lower and lower and lower. When its journey ended, she began a new one with her lips. She didn't stop moving even after she reached the junction of Sameen's legs. She only did after Sameen's toes curled and the grip on her hair lessened.

Root bid her time to plant small kisses all over Sameen's skin, trying to make the most of their time together. Too bad for her, The Machine beeped in her ear with information of a new number. She tried to ignore Her, but she could never do that for long. She buried her face on the crook of Sameen's neck, closing her eyes and concentrating on the feeling of the hand running through her hair and back. Just another second. The Machine beeped again, with more urgency than before, and she sighed in defeat.

She lifted herself up, smiling at Sameen's tousled appearance and the fact that she was the sole cause of it. "I understand, I'm leaving now," she said to The Machine. Sameen gave her

a questioning look. “Time to go,” she told her as she climbed off from the bed. She put on her clothes with haste, all the while avoiding meeting Sameen on the eye.

“Where to?”

Root looked at her with an unreadable expression. “Saint Louis.”

“Oh, great.” Sameen kicked her legs over the bed and pulled on her underwear. She couldn’t find her bra and her tank top was ripped, so she dug in the cedar chest to get new ones. “I know a steak joint that serves a fillet that’s better than sex,” she said as she sat above the chest, fixing the strap of her tank top.

Despite everything, Root had to smirk at that. She stood in front of her, legs parted to accommodate her sudden intrusion and for a moment she believed whatever they were having could go farther than just sex. “I doubt it.” She bent forward to kiss her cheek. Her nails racking over the inner side of a bare thigh and Sameen shuddered. “Yummy as that sounds, you won’t be joining me.” She pecked her on the lips then pulled away. “You’re not going back to the Underworld?” she asked, forcing a smile and trying to play it off as nothing. Because it was what her apparently-immortal father had done and all she read about when a God had infatuation with human. They left once they got what they wanted.

Sameen stared back at her with furrowed brows. “No. You’re still not dead,” she said.

“Right...” Root smiled for real this time. Her relief was palpable as it left her in a sigh. “Can’t wait to bring me home and keep me for yourself?”

Sameen rolled her eyes.

“She still needs you somewhere else,” Root said.

“Where?”

“The nation’s capital.”

Chapter 5

Instead of taking the easy way and used a portal, Sameen took her sweet time by boarding a plane to DC. She wasn't excited to work with Harold and Reese, as they were just boring humans, but they were still far better than watching her parents in the Underworld. Her apprehension over the current setup lessened a little when she received a text from an unknown number on the phone she wasn't aware she had.

It was an airport garage number. The guard gave her a key and led her to a black sedan. It wasn't another sport car, but it would do. She was speeding out of the airport with no particular destination in mind when the phone rang. The call was patched to the car system through Bluetooth and with a tap on the correct button on the steering wheel, Root's voice filled the car.

"*Enjoying your present?*"

Sameen grinned, flooring the gas. On the other end, Root chuckled when she heard the car's roar.

"*Harold and John are in a bit of a pinch.*"

"I'm there. Where are 'em?"

"*She has set the GPS to lead you there.*"

The line went off. The screen on the dashboard changed into a map with blinking dot and arrow. Sameen followed its instruction with ease. After about five minutes of driving, she saw Reese and another bulky man engaged in a shootout, in the middle of the street, while police siren rang in the near distance. She rolled her eyes; Reese couldn't be more obvious if he tried. Accelerating the car, she opened her door just moment before she passed the unsuspecting man. It slammed him with full force, knocking him down in an instant. She turned the car around on the next intersection and rolled down the passenger side window as it came to a stop next to the bewildered men.

"You guys going my way?"

Once Reese saw that it was Shaw, he had gone back to drag the man he was shooting at, a ziptie already securing his wrists. "Hope you got extra space in the trunk."

Sameen grinned as she popped open the trunk. Harold guided another man to sit on the passenger side before getting in the backseat along with Reese. She never saw the old man, but he reeked of greed. From the way he kept fidgeting, she assumed he wasn't there on his own will. She then remembered the whole saving people business Root kept talking about.

"So you're the one we're saving?"

"Yeah. Who are you?"

“Right now I’m the getaway driver.”

He scoffed. “Boy, this just gets worse.”

Before Sameen could give a biting response, Reese spoke up, “Cheer up, Mac. You could be in the trunk with the guy who wants to kill you.” Just then, dull thumps resonated from the back, reminding them of said man’s presence. That shut down Mac’s whining.

Sameen glanced at Reese through the rearview mirror and sent him a grin when their eyes met. She liked this man. If he behaved, she would vote for him to be granted Elysium upon Death. Her attention went back to the road when she saw the flashing red and blue ahead. Local enforcement had blocked the access to leave the city. She offered a quick way out, but Harold said the term ‘blasting’ didn’t inspire great confidence. Thanks to Reese’s somewhat more sane suggestion, at least according to Harold, they ended up ditching the car and dragging two uncooperative men into an empty house in the suburbs.

She went along when Reese motioned her to take the guy from the trunk to get some answers. She didn’t know the deal with the greedy man anyway, only that his name was Roger McCourt, he was a congressman, and he was important somehow. Her charge, however, was wounded. She felt the slight thrill at the sight of blood and knew the gold rimming her eyes. He kept mum when faced with questions, not even the threat of leaving him to bleed out had managed to pry an answer from his mouth. She could fix him or she could let him die—she could do either way and it wouldn’t be her responsibility.

Harold turned out to be more useful than he looked. “That may not be necessary,” he said, just after she expressed her indifference on the man’s fate. He showed the man’s phone at Reese first before coming to her. “I was able to get into his phone through a key vulnerability in the SMS encryption.” He handed her the phone. A picture of the congressman was on it, along with *OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVE: PROTECTION* on top. “I think we may have misread the situation.”

“’Protect’?”

“Seems we’re not the only ones concerned with the congressman’s safety.”

“So who are you supposed to be protecting McCourt from?” Reese asked.

At last, it got the man talking. “I wasn’t given that information.” His voice was rough, both from the lack of use in the last hour and from the pain, yet he showed none of it. “But in the week we’ve been watching him, the only ones who have taken a shot at him are you,” he said, eyeing Reese.

Sameen exchanged a look with Reese, laden with question. He shrugged before following Harold out of the room while she stayed behind. Now that the man had given them the answer they needed, she would hold up their end of the bargain and began cleaning his injury. She had just finished putting his gauze when she heard the siren of a patrol car going down the road. They were moving grid to grid through the neighborhood. It was only about time before they came to the door and found them. They had to make a move before that

happened. She was going to tell that to the boys, but she walked in on a tension filled conversation instead.

“Greer is positioning Samaritan to replace The Machine.”

“McCourt is helping Decima,” Reese said. “We’ve been looking at him as a victim, but he’s really a perpetrator.”

“I’m not sure,” Harold countered. His ability to see different perspectives sometimes muddled the water, making it hard to differentiate black and white. “His involvement is tangential at best and he doesn’t know Greer’s intentions.”

All this talk about Root’s God and its rival was confusing for Sameen, but she knew that they received McCourt’s number was up or he wouldn’t be there with them. “But if he’s not a victim or a perp, then why did you get his number?” she asked, more for the sake of sorting her mind and making sense of the situation rather than anything else. “What is it that you’re supposed to be stopping?”

Reese was just as confused as Sameen was and he had been in this number business longer than she was. “I’m not sure we’re supposed to be stopping anything.” He turned to Harold, brows furrowed in deep thought. “Finch, you said McCourt could speed up or halt legislation.”

“Yes, he’s in a unique position to remove any legislative roadblock to Samaritan.”

“So without McCourt, Samaritan doesn’t get pass Congress.”

“And Greer wouldn’t get access to the NSA’s surveillance feeds.”

“Then that’s why we got his number.” Realisation downed on Reese. “He is the victim. His life is in danger.”

“But from who?” Sameen asked, getting more confused by the second.

“Us.” Reese stared at her instead of Harold, because they both knew his idealistic mindset wouldn’t understand that sometimes some people had to be sacrificed in order to save a lot more others. “I think The Machine wants us to kill McCourt.”

Sameen walked away when Harold argued back and Reese questioned him. It didn’t matter if they were playing judge and jury. It also wasn’t unusual for Gods to require sacrifices. Whether this God of Root had really demanded a sacrifice to secure itself and its subjects or not, didn’t mean anything in the face of Fate. Fate shall decide everything. She stood in the dark hallway, staring at an unaware McCourt through the French doors. Her eyes glowed as the numbers that mattered became visible for her.

Before she could convince Harold or Reese about the reality, the phone buzzed in her pocket. The same blocked number was calling. She stepped out to the foyer to take the call, ignoring the questioning look the men gave her as she passed them.

“*Hey, sweetie. You busy?*”

“A little.” Sameen glanced back to the hallway, where Reese and Harold continued their argument in hushed voice. “Skip the verbal foreplay, Root. Why you callin’?”

“*Can you open the door for me?*”

Sameen’s steps were quiet as she went to the front door. She held the gun close to her as she stood over the piling mails and peered through the window. She sighed, rolling her eyes when she saw Root standing on the porch. Tucking the gun away, she opened the door and glared at Root.

“You know, you could’ve knocked.”

Root grinned; she knew Reese would shoot her if she did knock. Still, she didn’t let the opportunity to tease Sameen slip away. “Knock knock?”

Sameen shook her head in exasperation. “I’m not playing this game with you right now.”

“There’s no time like the present, Sameen.”

Instead of entertaining Root’s antics, Sameen grabbed her arm and pulled her inside, shutting the door behind them none too gently. “Get in before anyone saw you,” she said. She checked through the window again, ensuring that no pesky neighbors, or worse, the patrol, had noticed Root. It was quite late and the porch was dark, but they couldn’t risk it. When she was sure it was safe, she turned to her. “Where the Hell did you come from?”

“El Paso, most recently. The thing with the narco-traffickers.” Root took off her beanie and fixed her hair. She smirked when she noticed Sameen’s envious stare regarding the number she just dealt with. “Very relevant, but not the point. Have the boys reach the verdict yet?”

“They’re still going on it, but whatever it is, that McCourt dude isn’t gonna die anytime soon.”

Root didn’t ask how Sameen could tell that, but she trusted her anyway. She was a Death God after all. “She knew him so well,” she said with pursed lips then went to join Harold and Reese, Sameen trailing behind her.

“—I’m afraid this is where I get off.”

“Don’t jump off the ship yet, Harry.” Their conversation died down when she made her presence known. Neither of the men bothered to ask how or why she was there since they were used to her popping up at random. “Hate to interrupt this stimulating conversation, but as Shaw said, we need to move.”

“And McCourt?” Harold sounded like he was almost too afraid to ask. “What are we going to do with him?”

“Harold, you of all people should know there’s more than one way to skin a cat.”

“What are you suggesting, Root?” Reese asked.

“She said we need a fixer.”

Harold was relieved that they wouldn’t need the gun Reese was holding to solve this problem. He had his phone out in no time. “I’ll call Miss Morgan, she—“

“We’re in DC,” Sameen said. “I know someone.” Everyone turned to stare at her, giving her a questioning look. Her grin became smug when even Root seemed lost, that God of hers must have not known about what she was talking about. It was always fun to beat another God. “Let’s get this congressman Pope-d.”

They ditched McCourt in the house and took the station wagon they found in the garage, much to Sameen’s displeasure. The Capitol police, Secret Service, and the rest of three-letters agencies were still hung up on finding their missing congressman. They concentrated their power on filtering the ways out of Washington, so no one was looking for the people going back into town. Even so, the trip remained a quiet one with The Machine’s possible order to kill a congressman weighing Harold down the most.

Olivia Pope and Associates’ office was located downtown, top floor of a five-story building with a nice view of the busy K Street. The lease was probably sky-high but it was charming, pretty similar to Harold’s abandoned library with its cracked windows and dull-colored walls, but the place was tidy and it got a working elevator.

Root waited until they reached their destination to voice the burning question she had for Sameen. “How did you know Olivia Pope?” she asked, their steps falling behind Harold and Reese as they made their way into the building.

“I don’t. My brother does.”

“You have a brother?”

Root didn’t conceal her surprise. There was little known about Hades. Rarely any source had mentioned that Persephone and he had offspring together—it was just assumed that they couldn’t have any, because he was the God of Death and she was the Goddess of Life. She knew Sameen in person and she had read about Macaria and Melinoe, but she wasn’t aware of any male progeny.

“Half-brother. Different father.”

Root nodded. “So, Olivia Pope, is she also...” She left the question hanging, gesticulating over Sameen to make her point across.

“The face that launch a thousand ships. She’s the Helen of Troy of this era, but no.” Sameen held Root’s gaze. “She’s not one of *us*.”

“I’m nothing like you, Sameen,” Root sighed as she watched Harold talked with the receptionist. “My father was useless. All he gave me is the ability to see things that normal people don’t see and the years of coming in and out of psychiatric facilities,” she said just moment before they boarded the lift.

Sameen had to bite her tongue. She had a good guest on Root’s father’s identity—had been sure of it for quite a while. They were too much alike despite never knowing each other. Her penchant for chaos, the recklessness in her actions, and even their stay in psychiatric facility (although his was up a notch with the whole *criminally insane* part). Myka’s apparent dislike of Root only pointed to one certain God, the God her own father was very fond of: the God of War.

The elevator dinged open and they filed out. The Machine had been feeding Root information regarding Olivia Pope and her associates, currents and ex. Their team wasn’t too different from their own. A young woman named Lyndsay Dwayer, or now known as Quinn Perkins after the whole Molotov Mistress debacle, welcomed them on the entrance. Not even a bit wary of the amount of clients so early in the morning, she was polite enough to lead them to the conference room and informed them that Olivia would arrive soon before she left to make their drinks. Harold had taken a seat, Root next to her, while Sameen and Reese remained standing and alert.

Less than five minutes later, Olivia Pope came in dressed in white, all dazzling and intimidating. Despite her commanding presence, she greeted them with a smile. The man trailing behind her was more interesting for Root, a deranged ex-CIA agent who used to be a homeless guy living in the subway, until Olivia picked him. He was the Reese to Olivia’s Harold, sans the clean shave and expensive suits. From the way he had grinned when he noticed Sameen, he was probably also her elusive half-brother.

Olivia shook Harold’s hand, watching the surprising interaction from the corner of her eyes. “What can I help you with, mister...”

“Wren.” Harold motioned at Root. “And this is my associate—“

“You can call me Root.”

There was another wordless exchange happened between Olivia and her right-hand man, one Root had assumed meant for him to check on their identities. She looked just a bit confused when instead of doing so, the man went to stand next to Sameen. They weren’t talking or even smiling at each other again, so she turned her attention back to the rest of her guests.

“I’m afraid I’m unable to be less forthright,” Harold began. “We need Congressman McCourt to be discharged from his position in the Rules Committee.”

Olivia’s brows hiked up. “Why?”

Harold couldn’t answer that—in fact, he didn’t even want to be there. He turned to Root, who understood the meaning behind his expression and spoke up on their behalf, “The government is resuming their surveillance program. Well, they never stop. They are just outsourcing it this time, to a company called Decima Technologies.” She was aware of how

much like a paranoid privacy nutjob she had come off as, but there was no other way to explain it without telling Olivia about The Machine. “We have to stop it.”

Olivia’s smile was a bit strained this time. “The government is not spying on—“

“October 18th, 2012. A low-level data entry specialist at NSA named Arthie Hornbacher came to you after he stole a program called Thorngate.” All three members of Pope and Associates tensed up at the information. Root didn’t hide her glee at their collective look of astonishment. “He tricked you to decrypt the program, but you handled him well,” she said while eyeing Olivia’s right-hand man.

What none of them knew was that Thorngate was just a snippet of what The Machine was capable of—a limb She could regrow anytime. Samaritan was a whole foreign body She couldn’t just remove or absorb without risking Her own existence.

“If you think a program in a tiny thumb drive is scary, imagine how terrifying a program that needs six multimillion-dollar generators just to power up *one* of its facilities.”

Olivia cleared her throat then, smoothening the nonexistence crease on her skirt. “I’m not confirming anything, but if another surveillance program is on the talk, the House Committee of Rules can push the bill forward quietly.” Her gaze hardened when she took a closer look at Reese—McCourt’s kidnapping case was all over the news all night long, so did the description of his kidnapper. “I’m glad you didn’t go forward with your initial plan, but I need to know why you want to stop this hypothetical program.”

“Northern Lights is still running.”

“The black budget has been leaked. The public knows. Northern Lights is done.”

Root considered giving Olivia another half-truth. “Well—“

“I have one rule with my client: don’t lie to me.”

“All I can say is something very bad will happen and a lot of people are gonna die.” Root knew it wasn’t convincing, so she asked back, “What does your gut tell you?”

“Outsourcing gives plausible deniability, which is good for the government. But the third party can abuse the power. Or sell information.” Olivia fought the shiver that ran down her spine. She, of all people, understood very well the feeling of being seen and sold as source of information. While a program wouldn’t experience the same terror, she also could tell that there were a lot of interested parties out there. “Let me think about it for a moment, if you’ll excuse me.”

She motioned at her right-hand man to come with her to her office and closed the door before Quinn could follow them. They could still see the conference room through the glass door, but their guests weren’t privy to their conversation. Still, she took precaution by turning her back toward the door while the man stood across her, hands behind his back like a soldier waiting for order.

“How did she know you, Huck?” She lowered her voice, as though she was afraid someone else might hear her. “Is she B613?”

“No, Sameen is family.”

Olivia cocked a brow at that. “She is family like us?”

Huck ran his eyes along the wooden floor before meeting Olivia’s stern ones. “She’s my sister.”

It had been hard for Olivia at first to understand that Huck wasn’t just a homeless man she met in the subway station by chance. That he wasn’t just a part of B613. That he had been broken long before her father recruited him. That he was torn to pieces by the Titans when he was just an infant. That his heart was reborn inside Dionysus and left him an empty shell.

“Okay.”

“Okay?”

“We’re taking the case.”

Huck smiled a bit as he nodded. Olivia watched him for a second longer before she went to inform the decision to their now-clients. Reese had slipped out in the meantime, heading to the private chartered terminal to catch a plane to New York, because they got another irrelevant number to take care of back at home. Quinn huffed, but did as Olivia told and started digging on Roger McCourt’s information.

“So Ares is her father,” Huck said. Sameen and he were standing together on the sideline of the conference room, talking in hushed voices. They hadn’t seen each other since they left the Marines, but not much had changed. He stuck McCourt’s picture Quinn had just printed out on the window glass. “That makes sense.”

Sameen noticed the contemplative look on his face. “Don’t even think about torturing or licking her face,” she said with a playful scowl. “You have your human, stay away from mine.”

Instead of pointing out that it was the first time she had ever claimed anyone as hers, he deflated. “Liv is just human. Quinn has traces of the Amazonians in her, but you get a *semidea*. They are like whiskey.” He had that look on, as though he was trying to contain the excitement so his bad guy wouldn’t come out. “You know how much I like whiskey.”

Their attention was drawn away when Olivia spoke to Harold on the other side of the room, “It’ll be more comfortable for you to wait in my office.” She kept a smile on with the offer. She had picked up his uneasiness since they entered and she had to reassure him before she left to do some digging of her own in the Capitol. “This can take a while.”

“Oh, we’re not staying,” Root said before Harold could move out of his seat and into Olivia’s office. “We just want to see how your team works, then we will be on our way. Don’t worry, your payment has already been transferred to your account.”

Olivia forced a smile. It wasn't even noon yet and the day was already getting weirder. "Very well then." She placed down her purse on the table; her plan was put into a halt for the moment. "There are fifteen seats on the Rules Committee. Congressman McCourt is part of the minority, but his aptitude as a deal maker precedes the position of his political party. He won't resign. Short of killing him—"

"We can kill him."

Olivia and Harold narrowed their eyes at Huck. "We *won't* kill him." She waited until he voiced his agreement before continuing, "There were only twenty members of Congress who were expelled before, fifteen from the Senate and five from the House. Most of them have to do with the confederacy back in 1860s."

"It's not too farfetched."

Olivia glared at Quinn.

"What?" Quinn shrugged, not bothered much with her boss' silent reprimand.

"He represents Illinois. And it's a serious allegation, it'll ruin his life."

"We're going to ruin it anyway," Huck said this time.

Quinn twirled around on her seat to high-five him, while Olivia started to realize how much she missed Abby and Stephen and Harrison. But Abby was turning into the White House's monster, Stephen was running with the Russians, and Harrison was dead and she'd rather not think about him now because it only made her sad.

"Expulsion of a Congress member almost always requires breaking the law and being convicted for it," she said, ignoring previous suggestions. "Bribery, tax evasion, sexual harassment. We'll start from there."

"Mister McCourt has been having an affair with his aide," Harold said. He wasn't at all excited about having a hand in ruining someone's life, but he got that necessary evil was indeed necessary sometimes. "His wife is aware of it, but six times in Congress, I imagine he has had more than one aide. You can start from there." He typed something on his computer. Across from him, a bewildered Quinn received an email. "Or his stock portfolio that's up twenty percent over the last year due to trades he made in the last two weeks."

"If you know all of these, mister Wren, why don't you handle him yourself?"

Harold smiled then, the first since they arrived. "Unlike you, Miss Pope, I prefer to work in secret." He closed his laptop and put it in his bag, knowing that it was time to leave. "Please try to make him step down on his own accord first, so there's no need to involve the press."

"I can't make promises, but I'll try."

"You'd make a good politician, Harry." Root squeezed his arm as she followed suit, standing up and smiling at Olivia. "I'm sure you'll handle it from here. Thank you for buying us time, we wouldn't have made it without your help."

Olivia didn't bother to question what that was supposed to mean. Harold left first, Root next to him. Sameen lagged behind to say goodbye to Huck, but she caught up with the other two in the elevator.

"It works?" Sameen asked Root as the elevator started it descent, knowing her God always kept her informed all the time. "The guy's taken care of?"

Root glanced at Harold, who had remained quiet next to her. "Olivia is good at what she does, but it's only a band aid," she said. She noted the hardened expression on his face and felt the impending doom coming. "Decima will have someone else on the committee to push the bill."

"We are ruining a man's career. Or worse, his life, for a temporary resolution?"

"Didn't kill him."

They went out of the elevator and the building in silence. There was finality in Harold's stance as he came to a stop outside the building and declared, "It's time for me to leave this ship, Miss Groves." And without further words or goodbye, he turned on his heel and limped his way down the street.

Root watched, but said nothing.

"Shouldn't we go with him?" Sameen asked.

Despite the way Root's body leaned forward, as though she did want to go after Harold, she shook her head. "We have a much larger objective to pursue." She turned toward the opposite direction, looking over her shoulder but it wasn't clear whether it was Sameen she was looking at or she was trying to catch one last glimpse of Harold. "Let's go."

Sameen didn't question it then. She might be a God and Root was her *semidea*, but she was still an outsider to the team. She didn't know and didn't care about whatever friction happening between them. She followed Root for a few blocks until they reached a nice hotel. Instead of going to the front desk first, they went straight to the elevator and got off on the third floor. Root headed to one of the rooms with the right keycard to open it. There was a duffel bag sitting on the edge of the bed, Sameen sat next to it while Root retrieved something from the closet. She came back with a garment bag and placed it on the bed. Sameen quirked a brow when she saw the black and white outfit inside.

"We lost and now you're committing yourself to be a nun?"

"No, Sameen." Root laughed as she got the attire out. She muttered *Astrid or Nova* while picking through her collection of fake IDs and ended up taking both into her pocket. "We lost a battle; we haven't lost the war yet."

"Harold is gone. Shouldn't you be more worried about him?"

"I do. We both do." Root sighed, but she didn't stop folding her leather jacket after she had taken it off. "But he can't be found when he doesn't wanna be found. Unfortunately for me,

there's no rest for the wicked." She faced the floor mirror on the corner and started to strip.

Sameen stared. Root had only taken off her shirt and left her jeans on. The tunic was big on her and there was no need to wear the scapular yet. The clothes was unflattering on her body, likely the purpose of such religious garment, but it was enough to give Sameen an appealing image of her being on her knees and 'prayed' to her. Root caught her smoldering stare through the mirror and gave her a teasing smirk in return, daring her to do anything with a lift of her brow.

"So, where are you going?"

"*We* are going to Storybrooke, Grumpy," Root said with a wink, missing the way Sameen's eyes had shone gold at the mention of the place.

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